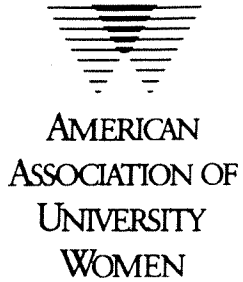


**Testimony on Single-Sex Education
House Office Building
Lansing, Michigan
June 14, 2006**



Good morning. My name is Barbara Bonsignore and I am here to give testimony on the position of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) on the subject of single-sex education, in my capacity as a Past State President of the AAUW of Michigan. Essentially, I urge you not to support this legislation because it violates Michigan laws that prohibit discrimination.

AAUW is committed to attaining an equitable learning environment for all students in coeducational public schools. AAUW believes that stronger public schools can improve student achievement. Policy-makers must look for solutions that benefit coeducational public schools, which more than 90 percent of elementary and secondary students attend.

Within public education, single-sex classes must be initiated in response to demonstrated need and be designed to inform and improve the coeducational school system where the majority of students continue to learn. Further, schools must comply with relevant civil rights laws, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (the federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in educational institutions receiving federal funds) and the Constitution's equal protection principles as articulated by the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 1998 the AAUW Educational Foundation released *Separated by Sex: A Critical Look at Single-Sex Education for Girls*, a comprehensive review of research on the subject. Although the research was inconclusive, the report found "no evidence that single-sex education is better than coeducation." Once the studies were adjusted for student socioeconomic status, pre-enrollment ability, selectivity of the school, and other variables, the differences diminished or disappeared.

Separated by Sex stressed that the long-term impact of single-sex education on girls or boys was unknown and that more research was needed. In addition the report suggested that successful practices and qualities common to single-sex education could benefit coeducational environments, as well, including:

- A focus on core academics
- Small class size
- Qualified teachers
- Sufficient funding
- Parental involvement

AAUW has concerns about the proliferation of single-sex schools.

- In *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) the Supreme Court said “separate but equal” is inherently unequal. Such separation sets up opportunities for discrimination and perpetuates stereotypes, whether intended or not.
- Meaningful school reform – for boys and girls – begins with fulfilling our existing promises to children and their parents.
- Title IX already allows flexibility for schools to segregate students by sex when there is a legitimate reason to do so. Single-sex classes and schools can be created to remedy past discrimination to allow girls and women to overcome historical barriers to equal education. Other specific circumstances in which Title IX allows for single-sex classes are competitive athletics, human sexuality classes, and choirs.

AAUW does not oppose the idea of single-sex education, so long as it is appropriate, necessary, and done in a manner consistent with constitutional requirements and existing antidiscrimination laws. Within public education, single-sex classes and schools must comply with relevant civil rights law, be initiated in response to demonstrated need, and be designed to inform and improve the coeducational school system. AAUW supports pilot and voluntary single-sex classes that meet the criteria just mentioned. AAUW would not oppose pilot single-sex schools that expand the research and meet the above criteria.

However, AAUW’s position is that single-sex education is not the solution. Because 90 percent of elementary and secondary students attend public school, AAUW believes legislators must develop strong, fair public schools – not single-sex education- to improve student achievement.

Research indicates that the properties of a good education – not a sex-segregated environment – make the difference. These properties include small classes, a rigorous curriculum, high standards, discipline, good teachers, and attention to eliminating gender bias.

Schools striving to achieve an equitable learning environment must adopt reforms that will help all students learn better in school. Strategies include teacher development in gender-fair teaching methods; recruitment and visibility of female and minority administrators to provide role models; adoption and dissemination of school nondiscrimination policies, sexual harassment policies, and prevention programs; and equitable athletic opportunities.

Research must be done with the goal of improving public education for all students. Pilot single-sex education experiments must have clear research questions in mind and an established process for data collection and evaluation. Pilot programs should continue for a sufficient time to ensure that their effectiveness can be adequately measured. The same course content and assessments should be used in single-sex and coed classes to enable comparisons.